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The Advisors: Oppenheimer, Tuller, and the Superbomb

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(despite our official U.S. doctrine on insurgency) and there is much in common with the sweep of revolutionary effort be it the Han/Ch'u uprising in China, 206 B.C., or Colombian insurgency of 1899-1903 (with its continuing aftermath down to the present). Indeed, it is Wilkinson's carefully tended thesis that such parallels as he develops lend themselves to models which suggest strongly why winners win and losers lose in these intense, bloody, and protracted conflicts.

In developing his theses, Wilkinson dissects his cases in terms of the political and military factors at work, attempting to establish certain operational principles such as leadership, strategy, organization, political base, and timing, among others. With such historic axioms as he culls from the case studies at hand, he then subjects his factoring to an exercise in model building which assesses the prototype loser and victor. Of especial interest to the American student of revolution in this regard is his analysis of what he calls "the dilemma of the moderates," a phrase quite consistent with the traditional American stance, one of hope, then of disillusionment, often followed by misapplication of tactical principles.

The author is well aware of overgeneralization of complex historic situations. For that reason his analyses are particularly attractive. What more concise commentary regarding Vietnam can be found than in his observation, "Politicization of war, along with atavistic reversion to a more primitive style of war and politics, are the distinguishing marks of revolutionary civil war."

Wilkinson depicts the ideal loser as trapped in a state without a unifying motivation, without goals, fractionalized, leaderless, cynical, and corruptible. The ideal winner in revolutionary war is highly organized, authoritarian, dedicated, led by a charismatic leader with determined goals and strong control of society. Against this background the moderate, the author argues, is helpless and ineffective precisely because he avoids extremes which revolutionary warfare emphasizes. From this analysis the author suggests that the price of victory is a movement toward a militant, centralized, autocratic, often repressive regime.

This is a basic work, often fascinating, well written, complete with an interesting and understandable chapter on methodology. As a reference work this book may be highly valued; as a source for the student at the Naval War College it is to be commended.

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York, Herbert. *The Advisors: Oppenheimer, Teller, and the Superbomb.* San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1976. 175pp.

This is a strange little book about a crucial decision, whether to build the hydrogen bomb. It is very brief, very personal, and so necessarily cryptic about technical details that it appears almost abrupt in style. York notes in the introduction that the work is not a memoir, yet it is not strictly history either.

The central theme of the book is the internal dynamic of technology, and the often puny attempts of man to resist its imperative expansion. In this, diminutive Robert Oppenheimer emerges as a giant among his fellows. Whether one agrees with his position or not, the reader cannot help but admire the rare courage with which Oppenheimer stated his objections to the technological imperative and worked within the system to resist it. In the end, he lost of course, overwhelmed by the events of the day rather than by refutation of his arguments. The logic in those arguments stands inviolate in the text of York's book, a monument to the remarkable

foresight in conception of Robert Oppenheimer.

The Oppenheimer group's objection to the development of the hydrogen bomb was not based on pacificism or anything resembling it. They were firmly committed to the development and production of *usable* nuclear weapons which they conceived as more efficient explosive devices. Moreover, they strongly favored the use of "booster" techniques to enhance the power of tactically employable weapons. But they risked their careers and reputations to oppose the development of a hydrogen bomb, unless forced to respond to Soviet development of such a weapon. In a paragraph which rings awesomely familiar across the intervening years, Oppenheimer and his associates wrote in late 1949:

> We base our recommendation [not to build a superbomb] on our belief that the extreme dangers to mankind inherent in the proposal wholly outweigh any military advantage that could come from this development. Let it be clearly realized that this is a super weapon; it is in a totally different category from an atomic bomb. The reason for developing such super bombs would be to have the capacity to devastate a vast area with a single bomb. Its use would involve a decision to slaughter a vast number of civilians. We are alarmed as to the possible global effects of the radioactivity generated by the explosion of a few super bombs of conceivable magnitude. If super bombs will work at all, there is no inherent limit in the destructive power that may be attained with them. Therefore, a superbomb might become a weapon of genocide.

However, an atmosphere of mistrust and fear lay heavily across the country in late 1949. The Soviet nuclear detonation had occurred in August, and Truman had announced the news to the Nation in September. China had finally fallen to the Communists, and the Sino-Soviet bloc had been boastfully proclaimed by Stalin and Mao. Senator Joseph McCarthy was in full cry, pursuing the traitors he saw in every Government agency. It was not a propitious time for the cold logic and prudent risk-taking required for a decision to slow the burgeoning nuclear arms race.

The Special Subcommittee of the National Security Council, assigned to the problem, presented Truman with a split decision. Secretary of State Acheson and Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson recommended proceeding with the H-Bomb development; the Atomic Energy Commission Chairman, David Lilienthal, dissented, agreeing with Oppenheimer. Truman went along with his Cabinet members, the majority, and on 31 January the President announced his decision to continue work on the weapon. Lilienthal retired immediately after Truman's decision. Oppenheimer stayed on, to continue his opposition until he was discredited by charges of disloyalty (never proven), and his security clearance withdrawn by then-Chairman of the AEC Lewis Strauss, in 1953. Ten years later, President Lyndon Johnson presented Oppenheimer with the Fermi Award, the highest honor for service in the field of nuclear energy.

Recently former Secretary of State Dean Rusk noted that there are a few crucial points in history to which one can point and say of them, that had the decision been otherwise, it would have changed the course of history. He noted that the Soviet decision to block internationalization of nuclear energy in 1946 was one such turning point.

York here implies that the Truman decision of January 1950 was another such crossroad. It is possible that the Soviets, too, would have preferred to develop usable battlefield weapons rather than those of terror; or, that the

intensity of the cold war might have cooled somewhat during a pause in weapon development. Personally I doubt it, but in that skepticism lies a melancholy recognition that the dynamic of arms races may not be wholly subject to man's logical control. York has more faith in his fellows than others of us do, and he poses a question which we doubters must face: In the end, as weapons provide us the capability for Clausewitzian absolute war, is there any substitute for logic in its employment? York's strange little book provides no answer, just some discouraging evidence that in the beginning of this era, logic was overcome by other, less attractive, forms of reason.

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RECENT BOOKS

by

Ann Hardy, with Kathleen Ashook
Doris Baginski, and Mary Ann Varoutsos

Staff, Naval War College Library

Barger, Thomas C. *Arab States of the Persian Gulf.* Newark: University of Delaware. College of Marine Studies. Center for the Study of Marine Policy, 1975. 93pp. $3.50

The former President, then Chairman of the Board of Aramco is the author of this monograph which briefly surveys the land and the people of the Arab States on the Persian Gulf, traces the course of petroleum production and pricing policies, reports on the OPEC and the oil embargoes, and offers some conclusions on the future of energy policy and its worldwide effects.

Bayes, Thomas. *Facsimiles of Two Papers by Bayes.* New York: Hafner, 1963, c. 1940. 66pp. $5.95

The Reverend Thomas Bayes' 1761 essay on the theory and application of probability is a mathematics classic. It is reproduced here in its 1763 published form, complete with printer's errors and original spelling. The second paper is Bayes' note on the summation of divergent series.

Beier, Ernst G. and Valens, Evans G. *People-Reading; How We Control Others, How They Control Us.* New York: Stein and Day, 1975. 228pp. $8.95

Endeavoring to understand why people behave as they do and what kind of information must be sought and employed to change behavior, the authors investigate many examples from the spectrum of human behavior patterns, identifying them as the individual's conscious or unconscious communication, often used to gain control over others. In each case it is suggested how change can be effected.